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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002140

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DEPT FOR EB/TRA/OTP AND EUR/SE  
PARIS FOR TSA  
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BRUSSELS FOR FAA AND TSA  
ROME FOR ICE

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: EAIR ASEC TU  
SUBJECT: CIVAIR: NEW TRANSIT PASSENGER  
ARRANGEMENT/LIGHTER BAN PUBLICIZED

Ref: (A) State 41383 (B) State 66181

Summary

¶1. (U) On March 27, Turkish authorities eliminated a gap in the border control system by requiring passport and customs controls to be performed at the initial airport of entry, rather than at the final destination. The change, which also affects transit passengers leaving Turkey, has led to passenger complaints. Turkish authorities have publicized the TSA lighter ban. End Summary.

Transit Passengers - Loophole Eliminated

¶2. (U) Following more than a year of Embassy advocacy on this issue, Turkish aviation authorities on March 27 reverted to their earlier practice of requiring international passengers connecting to domestic flights to clear passport and customs control at the first port of arrival in Turkey (usually Istanbul Ataturk Airport). Previously, transit passengers were subject to these controls at their final destination, but systems for ensuring this were weak and circumventing them was a real possibility. In addition, the GOT also required, as of the same date, that travelers departing Turkey clear customs and exit controls at the last airport in the country. Both changes require transit passengers to claim and re-check baggage at the first port of entry and last port of exit in Turkey.

¶3. (SBU) The changes should not impact implementation of TSA's emergency amendment requiring additional screening

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for U.S.-bound flights from Istanbul, but do add the hassle of claiming and re-checking luggage for Turkish Airlines (THY) passengers (including those with American Airlines codeshare tickets). According to Delta's station manager in Istanbul, the changes apparently affect only passengers connecting to THY international flights, since those transferring from domestic flights to other carriers, including Delta, had already been required to claim and recheck their luggage in Istanbul. In this way, the new measures in one sense level the playing field between THY and foreign carriers.

¶4. (SBU) THY's Chief Manager of Ground Operations told us on April 8 that the new measures are being implemented successfully, but that there have been passenger complaints and that THY has been forced to increase the minimum time for flight connections from 45 to 90 minutes. The THY representative predicted that the new policy, in combination with the new EC regulation on Air Passenger Rights, would cost the airline millions of dollars this year in compensation and lodging costs.

¶5. (SBU) Istanbul Ataturk Airport's Director of Airport Police remarked to Econoff April 8 that the new system was working, but expressed concern that border control officials were now performing significantly more passport checks (around twice as many as previously) with the same number of staff (protect).

¶6. (SBU) While the new policy is good news, it remains to be seen whether border and customs authorities will continue to give security priority over passenger comfort. We understand that passenger complaints, especially by those from political and business elites in Turkey, led to the abandonment of the same system several years ago.

Explosive Detection System

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17. (SBU) THY and Delta Station Managers noted that the current terminal operator's contract was set to expire this spring, and that Ataturk Airport would gain an Explosive Detection System (EDS) with the next operator. However, the Airport Police Director pointed out that a dispute between the State Airport Authority (DHMI) and the operator (Tepe Akfen - TAV) over the terms of the latter's build-operate-transfer contract could delay turnover to a new operator and hence installation of the EDS.

TSA's Ban on Lighters

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18. (U) Per ref A, Econoff on March 10 informed the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the Turkish National Police (TNP) and MFA that lighters will be banned from U.S. flights. On March 24, DGCA referenced this message on its website, though it added matches to the list of items banned from U.S. flights. DGCA told us that this information was publicized in the Turkish press. THY's station manager claimed on April 8 the lighter ban was already being implemented. TNP and Gozen Security both indicated recently to Consular Section Chief that while they will implement the lighter ban, they think lighters will be easy to miss in screening.  
Edelman